

CONTACT REPORT

Re: Botschafterrat a. D. Gustaf HILGER

Written: 13 March 1957

Background: See contact report written 9 February 1957.

On 27 February I lunched with Legationsrat von Staden, the deputy chief of the Soviet Desk of the German Foreign Office. He mentioned among other things that Hilger had been awarded the Grand Cross of Merit of the German Federal Republic a few days ago. (Grosses Bundesverdienstkreuz). The award was made by Foreign Minister von Brentano himself. Hilger, von Staden said, had been called in without knowing what was up and came out of the office beaming.

Later that afternoon I called Hilger to congratulate him and invite him to luncheon. Mrs. Hilger answered the phone, said he was out of town making a speech (in Hamburg, I believe). She accepted for the following Sunday.

I drove into Bonn and picked them up Sunday 3 March 1957 at 1300. After a drink at their place we drove to the American Club in Plittersdorf. Hilger mentioned that he had recently seen von Staden, who had mentioned seeing me occasionally at the Ministry.

During luncheon Hilger mentioned, in connection with the current (and still current) rumors that Mikoyan might visit Bonn, that he had been fairly close to Mikoyan years ago and that, as much as one could say this of any Soviet, he considered Mikoyan his friend. He added that Mikoyan might call him, or he might call on Mikoyan, if the latter did in fact visit Bonn this spring. I wanted to find out how much of this rather tempting operational possibility was mere dropping (of which Hilger tends to be very guilty) and how much was fact. So I said that if the Soviets came to visit him it would only be to settle old scores. Hilger had read Count von Schulenburg's declaration of war to Molotov. Hilger replied, with some depth, nostalgia and reflection, that Molotov, Mikoyan and the others knew full well that he and von Schulenburg had tried desperately to avoid the German attack on the Soviet Union, and therefore bore him no personal grudge. (Comment: From what I know of the diplomacy of the time, and of other peoples -- such as George Kennan's -- appraisals of Hilger, and what we can surmise about Soviet interests and procedures in 1957, I think Hilger probably stated this all honestly and correctly. I think he does have an access of a sort to Mikoyan, or would have if Mikoyan were to come to Germany. All the more so because Hilger was primarily active in the economic field. There seems to be just enough likelihood that Mikoyan will visit West Germany and Bonn sometime this spring or soon after, that it would seem wise to start collecting our thoughts on what if anything we propose to do about this (admittedly remote) operational possibility. In any case, it would seem better to start now than to do the same thing in a hectic rush at the last minute. One possible angle would be through my Schmidt-Genders contact in the Economics Ministry.)

After a fair amount of chatter about mutual friends and acquaintances in Bonn and Washington, Hilger asked if I had heard that [] (see previous contact report) had been in the area. I replied that I had not. He said he would be seeing [] soon and would no doubt have news of [] from him.

NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT

EXEMPTIONS Section 3(b)

(2)(A) Privacy ☐

(2)(B) Methods/Sources ☒

(2)(G) Foreign Relations ☐

Declassified and Approved for Release
by the Central Intelligence Agency
Date: 2005

...the H. Y. TIMES man in town, stopped by our table for a drink...
...indicating that he had invited Hilgers to his house sometime in
...few days.

After luncheon I invited the Hilgers over to my apartment for a cognac (and
to satisfy their ill-concealed curiosity to see how I was installed, etc.) I offered
to show them some of my Soviet trip pictures--a few non-sensitive black-and-white
which had purposely been rather poorly printed on regular commercial format. He
was muchly interested, and said I should write down where they had been taken, and
that there was much worthwhile material here. (Hqs has, of course, a very detailed
captioning, analysis, etc). I said I doubted this, appeared most casual about the
pictures, and threw them back into the bookcase. This was just one more little
occasion at which I tried to give the impression of not being intelligence-
conscious, and I think it worked.

Conversation then turned to Guenther Scholl, Chief of the Soviet Desk at the
Embassy. Hilger asked what I thought of him. Fortunately, we had just been talking
about the GPO's lack of a new generation of Soviet specialists, and Hilger had
quoted some newspaper account that lumped Scholl and himself together as the
Soviet experts. I smiled and said I didn't think Scholl had Hilger's background
or experience. Hilger then held forth at some length on how innocent and
uninformed both Scholl and von Steden were. I said that I had seen Scholl
on inspection through the press--said nothing but took it all in. Hilger
said that one day he was called in by Zientano to get his medal. Scholl had
to suggest, thinking that the Minister of Foreign Affairs had named him
for an opinion. Hilger added that when he came out of von Steden's
office, that he (Scholl) had nothing to worry about, that Hilger was the
one who had only gotten decorated. This whole frame of reference
led me to conclude: (1) That the present incumbents of the Soviet Desk
are not unusually qualified and perhaps seriously incompetent. (2) That
Hilger's expertise which unfortunately was considerable, was
being used as an unwitting informant on German-Soviet relations
and that such a far as younger and more capable Soviet
specialists--there are none coming along in the pipeline.

...inconsistent talk and the inevitable Hilger...
...they do seem to like to get out and move around...
...diplomatic corps. At this meeting he...
...it is impossible for me to tell Hilger...
...the details of my business there. It is therefore...
...he must be prepared to give information and get none in return.